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ABSTRACT

An analysis of the use of attenuation (structural or semantic softening of the speech act) and sentence structure in elicited speech acts by normally developing, learning disabled, and developmentally delayed populations is presented. In the normally developing population (1) the development of attenuation strategies is different from structural development; (2) register may be an important factor in determining appropriate attenuation devices; (3) attenuation increases with age; and (4) children in the middle age group (11-12 years) try a variety of devices, later reducing that number. The language-learning disabled group used a variety of attenuation devices which differed qualitatively or completely from those of the normal group. The developmentally delayed population used fewer attenuation devices than the normal group, and semantic devices predominated, suggesting overgeneralization of the use of specific devices. It is suggested that instruction for the language-learning disabled group focus on the appropriate use of devices in a variety of speech acts, and instruction for the developmentally delayed group, which has a limited repertoire, concentrate on training of specific devices. (MSE)

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Development of Attenuation Patterns in the Controlling Communicative Function

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This paper presents the analysis of the use of attenuation and structure in elicited speech acts by normally developing, learning disabled and developmentally delayed populations. Data was obtained through elicitation of speech acts in the Controlling Communicative function component of the Let's Talk Inventory for Adolescents (Wiig, 1982). The following patterns were observed:

Normally Developing Population:

- o In the normally developing population, the development of attenuation strategies is different from structural development, and has its own set of features.
- o In speech acts where significant changes took place in both attenuation and structure across age groups, these changes appear to be related in some cases and unrelated in others.
- o Looking at Peer and Authority contexts within each speech act, it appears that register may be an important factor in determining appropriate attenuation devices in the majority of speech acts. Each register may require a different set of features, not just more or less of features used by the other register. There is a qualitative as well as quantitative difference between the registers in use of attenuation devices.
- o There appear to be two basic patterns of change in the use of attenuation across age groups; a steady increase with age, indicating increased competence with age; and a rising-falling pattern. The second pattern suggests that the middle age groups may be trying out a variety of attenuation devices (hence the larger amount of devices used) and that by age 13-14 years they are approaching the adult formula for these speech acts.

Language-Learning Disabled Population

- o The language-learning disabled population used a variety of different attenuation devices. When compared with the 11-12 year old and 13-14 year old groups, two patterns were observed:
 - o in some speech acts, the language-learning disabled group differed qualitatively from the normal groups in their use of attenuation devices;
 - o in other speech acts, they used different devices than were used by the two normal groups.

Developmentally Delayed Population

- o The developmentally delayed population differs significantly from both the normal 7-8 year olds and 9-10 year olds in use of attenuation. The developmentally delayed used fewer types of attenuation devices than the normal population

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The use of semantic devices tended to predominate in the majority of speech acts, suggesting overgeneralization of use of a specific attenuation device.

Implications:

- o Development of attenuation is different from structural development, having its own set of features which can be addressed. Both disordered populations are attempting to attenuate in certain speech acts, indicating a basis for intervention.
- o Due to a limited repertoire, specific attenuation devices may need to be trained in the developmentally delayed population.
- o Intervention for the language-learning disabled group, who utilize a wider repertoire, may focus on the appropriate use of attenuation devices in a variety of speech acts.

Wiig, E. H. Let's Talk Inventory for Adolescents. Columbus, Ohio;
Charles E. Merrill, 1892.

DEVELOPMENT OF ATTENUATION PATTERNS IN THE CONTROLLING COMMUNICATIVE FUNCTION

The study of communicative competence in both normal and special populations is receiving increasing emphasis. Recently, attention has focused on the verbal-pragmatic component in communicative competence. Developmental patterns in verbal-pragmatic abilities have been observed in normal populations (Wiig, 1982). Research has shown that certain populations demonstrate delays and/or disorders in this domain (Bryan, et. al., 1891; Wiig, 1982). The Let's Talk Inventory for Adolescents (Wiig, 1982) was developed as a tool for the assessment of verbal-pragmatic skills, and played an integral part in this paper. This Inventory will be discussed further under procedures.

The purpose of this paper is to present the analysis of the use of attenuation and structure in elicited speech acts in the Controlling communicative function component of the Inventory.

****A communication function is defined as a series of speech acts that serve the same function. For example, the Controlling communication function is a series of speech acts which serve to influence or control another speaker.**

**** A series of Controlling Speech acts make up the Controlling speech function.**

**** Attenuation is the softening of a speech act via semantic/syntactic devices.**

Please refer to the following examples of attenuated utterances.

1. Open the window. (not attenuated)
2. Please open the window. (attenuated by the modifier please)
3. Would you open the window? (attenuated by the modal would)
4. It's hot in here. (attenuated by inferred intent)
5. Would you mind opening the window? (attenuated by the devices modal, embedded main verb, and question form)

The questions we addressed were as follows:

- o Is there a developmental pattern in the use of attenuation strategies by normally developing populations in elicited controlling speech acts?
- o Do attenuation strategies of disordered populations differ qualitatively and/or quantitatively from those of normally developing populations in an elicited speech act situation?

Before addressing the analysis and findings, let's first look at the Inventory.

The Let's Talik Inventory for Adolescents was used in the collection of data. The Inventory focuses on the ability to formulate and express 40 speech act intents from the major communication functions: Ritualizing, Informing, Controlling, and Feeling.

We focused on the Controlling speech function and its 11 speech acts, including Query Want, Offering Assistance, Commanding, Suggesting, Question for Permission, Question for Intention, Reminding, Promising, Warning, Negotiating, and Refusing.

Within each speech act two situational contexts were probed including an informal register representing the way we talk with peers, and a formal register representing the way we speak with authority figures.

Stimulus item 7 in the Controlling function was designed to elicit a reminding response. The situation in the informal or peer register reads:

"Steve had been told many times to feed his dog first thing in the morning. One morning Bob saw that Steve's dog hadn't been fed. Bob wanted to remind Steve to feed his dog. What do you think Bob said to Steve?"

Stimulus item 7B was designed to elicit a reminding response in the formal or authority register. It reads:

"Ms. Jones was called to the principal's office on the intercom. She forgot all about it. May wanted to remind Ms. Jones. What do you think May said to Ms. Jones?"

Moving now into more specifics reflected in our presentation, the populations involved in the collection and analysis of this data can be seen. We chose three populations. A normally developing group with chronological age range 7-8 to 13-14 years, a language learning disabled group with chronological age range 9.4 to 15.0 years, and a developmentally delayed group with chronological age range 15.3 to 25 years.

We looked at both attenuation and structure in our analysis. Attenuation, the softening of a speech act, can be accomplished structurally and/or semantically. The various features of attenuation we chose to look at were: Modal, Embedded Main Verb, Verb Complex, Modifier, Vocabulary Choice, Inferred, Apology, Added Speech Act, and Question Form.

In summary we looked at sentence structure and attenuation devices in the Controlling function in three populations across 11 speech acts. Due to the varied 'n' in the disordered populations, we based our results on the actual numbers used to express attenuation/structure in the normal population, and on proportions of numbers for the disordered populations

Let's first look at the analysis of the normal population.

An overview of significant and non-significant changes in proportions of attenuation features, changes in specific attenuation features and structural changes for Controlling as a function of age reveal the following:

For the normal population:

1. -6/22 speech acts displayed no significant change in either attenuation or structure. For example,
 - 2A In the peer register, Offering Assistance, there was no change in attenuation or structure.
 - 5A Asking Permission (peer)
 - 5B Asking Permission (authority)
 - 6B Question for Intention (authority)
2. -5/22 showed a significant change in attenuation, with no significant change in structure. For example,
 - 1A Question for Preference (peer)
 - 1B Question for Preference (authority)
- 3/22 showed a significant change in structure with no significant change in attenuation. For example,
 - 7A Reminding (peer)
 - 8A Promising (peer)
 - 8B Promising (authority)

This suggests that the development of attenuation strategies is different from structural development, and has its own set of features.

3. -8/22 speech acts had significant changes in both attenuation and structure. For example,

In some cases, these changes appear to be related for example in the peer register of the Warning speech act, the change over age in the use of inferred intent as an attenuation device may be related to the change in the use of declarative structure. Instead of being direct and saying "Don't jump off the roof," some age groups used an inferred warning such as "You might hurt yourself." or "It's a long way down," which are declarative sentences.

In other cases, it appears that the changes in attenuation and structure are unrelated; for example, the Reminding speech act, authority register has significant changes in both attenuation and structure but the pattern of change is different. In addition, there is no one attenuation feature showing a significant change with age which would be expected if attenuation and structure were in fact related in this speech act.

4. Looking at peer and authority contexts within each speech act, for example,

in Refusing, only 2/11 speech acts show significant changes in the use of attenuation in both registers and have similar patterns of change in both registers. However, in Suggesting speech act, only 1/11 has a significant change in the use of attenuation device in both contexts.

This suggests that different changes are taking place in the two registers in the majority of speech acts. Register may be an important factor in determining appropriate attenuation devices. Each register may require a different set of features, not just more or less of features used by the other register.

5. There appear to be two basic patterns of change in use of attenuation across age as in the authority register of the Question for Preference speech act (6/22), and the second is a "rise and fall pattern" found in 7/22 11-12 year age group in the authority register of the Offering Assistance speech act. This second pattern suggests that the middle age groups may be trying out a variety of attenuation devices (hence the larger amount of devices used) and that by age 13-14 years they are approaching the adult formula for these speech acts. This conclusion is further supported by that 3/6 of the "steady increase" group have specific attenuation devices which showed significant change with age, whereas only 1/7 of the "rise and fall" group has a specific attenuation device which changed significantly with age. The pattern of change in use of specific attenuation features generally matches the pattern of change in overall use of attenuation.

In summary, we can suggest that there is a developmental pattern in the use of attenuation strategies by normally developing populations in elicited Controlling speech acts, and that the development of attenuation strategies is different from structural development, and has its own set of features. Further, register may be an important factor in determining appropriate attenuation devices.

Results of LLD and Developmentally Delayed Populations:

As preface: All of the LLD children in this population have received traditional syntactically-semantically based language therapy for periods of 2-4 years.

We compared the LLD population to two normal groups, the 11-12 year olds and 13-14 year olds. We found that the LLD population had the same repertoire as the normals, that is, the same number of syntactic attenuation devices, e.g. modals and embedded verbs, and quantitatively the same semantic devices, e.g. modifiers and inferred intents. However, they differed in the manner in which they used devices for particular speech acts. For example, they used embedded verbs significantly more than the normal groups in 5/11 speech acts in at least one register. Appropriately in the formal register they responded, "What time do you plan to drive home?" in the speech act Question for Intention. But in the Warning speech act responses included,

"I don't think you should touch that wire." Clearly, if you want to stop someone from being electrocuted it would be more effective to say "Don't do that," or "Watch out!"

This is not to say that they didn't use imperatives for in fact, our data showed that they used more imperatives than the normal groups in 5/11 speech acts, in at least one register. In four of these five, they exclusively used an imperative. The use of this structure generally precludes the use of any attenuational device, an exception being the addition of a modifier, such as "Close the door, please." Results for the speech act Request for Action indicated unique use of the imperative with significantly less use of modifiers. So, they responded, "Answer the phone" rather than "Would you please answer the phone for me?" Similarly, in the speech act Negotiating, typical responses included, "Don't let anyone buy this until I get \$50, cause I only have \$100." and "Lower the price on the moped and I'll buy it." What is striking about these responses is the absence of attenuation devices such as modals, embedded verbs, and modifiers, all of which were used more frequently in the normal groups.

The LLD group used an inferred intent as an attenuation device more than the normals overall. This particular device can be extremely effective when used appropriately such as the response they gave in the Suggesting speech act, referring to suggesting where to place a microscope. "The light over here is a lot better," rather than "Here, why don't I put it over here?" But they also used an inferred intent for the Warning speech act, "If you jump off you're gonna break your neck." If we attribute this use of inferred intent as a stylistic difference that is in fact effective, we surely could not do the same for the response in the same speech act, "I don't think you should do that."

In summary, results of our analysis revealed that this LLD group has acquired the same repertoire of attenuation devices as the normals and in fact uses them in a similar way quantitatively. But, they use them indiscriminantly in both the peer and formal registers. This suggests that they do not have a clear understanding of the impact these devices have on their listener. It is of interest that during the testing they frequently expressed some awareness of their inappropriateness. For example, one child said, "That is not how you talk to a teacher, but I can't think of anything else."

Implications for pragmatically based intervention should begin at the level of discrimination training. Role playing situations that would elicit specific speech acts would be one way of allowing them to feel, hear, and see the impact their responses are having on others and on themselves. Once an awareness is

taught and mastered, intervention can then focus on maximizing their effectiveness for getting an intent across through the use of modelling and role playing.

We now turn to the results of the second disordered population, the developmentally delayed. We compared this group to two normal populations, 7-8 year olds and 9-10 year olds. The significant findings were that the delayed population used fewer attenuation devices than the normals and that these were overwhelmingly semantic in nature, such as modifiers and apologies. For example, in the Promising speech act the Developmentally Delayed said, "Excuse me, I'm sorry, maybe you can borrow it tomorrow." In this response not only are they using two modifiers and an apology, but in fact these types of devices are inappropriate for promising. There is no reason to excuse oneself when making a promise. This suggests that the developmentally delayed are using or attempting to use attenuation devices but may be over-generalizing these responses in a rote way rather than using them selectively.

Additionally, the DD population used a high proportion of imperative when compared to the normal groups. As stated earlier, this precludes the use of attenuation devices. For example, in the Reminding speech act they responded, "Hold everything! Go in the house and feed your dog." in the peer register, and "Remember to go to the principal's," in the formal register. Unlike the LLD population, however, it appears that the DD use the imperative not because they aren't discriminating the impact on their listener, but rather because their repertoire is so limited and subsequently over-generalized.

These findings suggest that pragmatically-based intervention for the delayed population must begin by teaching additional attenuation devices to enhance their repertoire. When this has been achieved, careful monitoring of the use of these devices in relation to specific speech acts would become the primary focus. This might best be accomplished by role-playing and imitation of a presented model.

In conclusion, our results show that there is a developmental pattern in the use of attenuation strategies by normally developing populations in elicited speech acts. In addition, attenuation strategies of the two disordered populations, the language-learning disabled and the developmentally delayed, differ qualitatively and quantitatively from those of normally developing populations in an elicited speech act situation.

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DEVELOPMENT OF ATTENUATION PATTERNS IN THE CONTROLLING COMMUNICATIVE FUNCTION

I. Important Terms:

Communication Function: A series of speech acts that serve the same function.

*Controlling Communication Function: A series of speech acts which serve to influence or control another speaker.

Speech Acts: An utterance or series of utterances that are used to realize an intent.

II. Overview of the Speech Acts and Communication Functions in the Let's Talk Inventory for Adolescents (Wiig, 1982).

<u>Ritualizing</u>	<u>Informing</u>	<u>* Controlling</u>	<u>Feeling</u>
1. Greetings	1. Yes/No Question	1. Query Want	1. Endearment
2. Farewells	2. Who/What Question	2. Offering	2. Exclamation
3. Calls	3. Where/When Question	3. Commanding	3. State Question
4. Introducing oneself	4. Reason Question	4. Suggesting	4. Approval
5. Introducing others	5. Name Question	5. Permission	5. Disapproval
6. Availability response	6. Affirmative	6. Intention	6. Congratulating
7. Request to repeat	7. Denial	7. Reminding	7. Bragging
8. Telephoning	8. Rejection	8. Promise	8. Blaming
	9. Evasion	9. Warning	9. Agreeing
	10. Justification	10. Negotiating	10. Disagreeing

DEVELOPMENT OF ATTENUATION PATTERNS IN THE CONTROLLING COMMUNICATIVE FUNCTION

Attenuation

Attenuation: The softening of a speech act via semantic or syntactic devices.

The following are examples of attenuation devices:

1. Open the window. (not attenuated)
2. Please open the window. (modifier)
3. Would you open the window? (modal)
4. It's hot in here. (inferred intent)
5. Would you mind opening the window? (modal, embedded main verb, and question form)

POPULATION	AGE RANGE	Population		TOTAL
		MALES	FEMALES	
Normally Developing	7-8 yrs.	8	8	16
	9-10 yrs.	8	8	16
	11-12 yrs.	8	8	16
	13-14 yrs.	10	6	16
	Total	26	22	64
Learning Disabled	9.4 - 15.0 yrs.	11	0	11
Developmentally Delayed	15.3 - 25.0 yrs.	7	6	13
		12		